



*A Tidewater ship at an early jack-up in the Gulf of Mexico. The position held by a single rope indicates that possibly the technique of tying up stern to had yet to be developed. Picture: Tidewater Publicity.*

For instance the 136 foot H.B. Carlton, built in 1956 for Caldwell Well Services (and later to become the Low Tide), was powered by two 500 BHP Enterprise diesels which were reversible. In other words, to get the ship to go astern the engines had to be stopped and then restarted in the other direction. More will be written later in this volume about the means used to control the ships in close proximity to oil rigs, but it is probably worth considering now the difficulty faced by the captain of the H.B. Carlton during the process of tying up to a LeTourneau jack-up.

First of all, the fact that the engines had to be stopped and reversed implies that the engineer had to be down in the engine room at the controls, and that the instructions from the bridge were passed down either using an engine telegraph, or more likely in such a small craft by voice pipe. If he adopted the technique of dropping the anchor and running in towards the rig forwards, he would get to a point where he would have to shout down to the engineer to stop one of the engines and put it astern, probably leaving the other engine driving the ship forward. The wait while this change of direction was carried out must have seemed interminable. The chain would still be rattling out of the chain locker and the ship, one engine ahead, would be pressing on towards the rig. It would not be until the other engine fired up that he could swing the wheel over and turn the ship, now minimising the power of the ahead engine and instructing the engineer to give him full power on the astern engine. It must have been a stressful experience.